DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 179 994 CS 205 350

AUTHOR Purves, Alan C.
TITLE Unity in Diversity.
PUB DATE Nov 79
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (69th, San Francisco, CA, November 22-24, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cultural Differences; *Educational Coordination; *Educational Objectives; *Educational Philosophy; *English Instruction; Language Arts; *Teacher Responsibility; Teacher Role; Teaching Quality
IDENTIFIERS *National Council of Teachers of English

ABSTRACT

The cultural diversities of peoples and dialects in the United States have brought a richness to the English language that has made it one of the most supple of all the languages in the world. In addition to the diversity in the language are the diversities in literature, technology, nationality, politics, and styles of teaching. Teachers of English must sense that in this diversity lies the possibility of unity, a potential shared with international colleagues based on four common aims: to help all learners become eloquent, to help all learners understand and evaluate what is said or written, to help all learners become aware of and respect other cultures, and to help all learners respect their basic language. These aims can unify the teaching profession, clarify objectives, and permit a sharing of successes and challenges within the profession. The goals for the National Council of Teachers of English should be to advise each other, to advise other colleagues in English and in related disciplines, and to advise and take advice from the public. Three steps in the direction of unity are the proposal of a series of international commissions, the work of the Commission on the Curriculum, and the implementation of a statement entitled, "The Essentials of Education." (An extract from the statement is included.) (AEA)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Alan C. Purves
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED179994

# Unity in Diversity

Alan C. Purves

Our world is a large and complex one: well over a hundred nations, well over a thousand languages. Even the nations retain size and complexity. In this country, we have areas with ethnic populations as large or larger than the largest city of their native land: more Puerto Ricans in New York than in San Juan; almost as many Spanish-speaking people in California as in Mexico City. Among the English-speaking groups in this country there is linguistic diversity, from the laconic New England speech to the Creole dialects of Louisiana. The cultural diversities of peoples and dialects have brought a richness to our language, English, and have helped make it one of the most supple of all the languages in the world.

Just as our language is diverse, so is our literature. The ancient traditions from Greece, Rome, and Israel and from Western Europe fed into our English heritage. But American literature consolidated this tradition with other traditions -- those of the native Americans, of the African and Caribbean peoples, of the immigrants from Eastern Europe and Asia. The roots of American literature spread throughout the earth. As a result, any modern American novel or play, even one as "American" as Our Town, is woven from many diverse strands.

A third aspect of diversity lies in our technology, which continually changes the reality in which we live and the language we use as we seek to understand and control it. Our use and misuse of our technology and the meagre resources of our planet, have brought about the necessity for an increasing diversity of occupations and of skills needed to succeed in those occupations. Our dealings with technology have also brought about strains on our society: those who would rush forward contend with those who would hold fast.

CS205350

If we are to turn from the subject that we teach to the people who teach it, we again find diversity. We are of many national origins, of many hues, men, women, young, old, working in large city and hamlet, with children just beginning to talk and with adults or the elderly. We are of many political persuasions and many persuasions about how to go about our business of teaching. We also represent diverse specialist and geographic organizations. Our journals, our publications, and our convention program dramatically represent our diversity.

Diverse as we are, we come to San Francisco as to any national meeting because we have in common the fact that we are -- most of us -- teachers of English. Diverse as we are, we come to one spot at one time to share our differences with each other and to seek unity. We sense that in our language, in our literature, in our beliefs, in our practices lie the possibility of unity.

I should like to spend a few minutes tonight and many hours this coming year, as your president, seeking that unity -- a potential unity that I think we share with our colleagues in England, Australia, Canada, with teachers of French in France, Japanese in Japan, or Hausa in Africa, and with teachers of other subjects. One thing that I hope we have in common with all these and with all teachers is ably summarized in Yetta Goodman's theme, "Respect for the Language Learner." But I should like to spend some time on goals and perhaps some time on means.

In general, I believe that our goals stem from four central aims we hold in common:

The aim of helping all learners become able to express their thoughts and feelings so that any who hears or reads can understand and emphasize. Learners have the right to their own idiom, but, more important, they have the right to become eloquent.

The aim of helping all learners understand what is said to them and what they read. I mean by understand the ability to grasp the content, tone, and intention of what is said or written, and to evaluate them.

The aim of helping all learners become aware of and respect the cultures that have contributed to this diverse but unified nation of ours, particularly as these cultures express themselves in stories, poems, plays, and other forms of literature.

The aim of helping all learners come to respect not only their diverse ways of using the language but the core language in which the many become one.

These four aims can unify our profession. If we can keep them in mind, I think much of our petty squabbling about this method or that, this text or that, this curriculum or that, this segment of our organization or that, might cease. Many approaches can achieve these aims; many have achieved them for a multitude of our past and present students. Society now asks us to realize these aims for more students and more diverse students and to realize them according to a higher standard than ever before. We are asked to teach people whom once we would have turned away: the disturbed, the criminal, the non-native speaker, the poor, the handicapped. We are asked to bring these as well as all other students up to higher levels of proficiency. Are we up to the challenge?

At times I am not sure that we are. I read or hear about our alleged unwillingness to deal with the reality of learners. Too often we act as if what may be appropriate for a select group of students is appropriate for all students. I read or hear our disputes about which objective is more worthwhile: writing or speaking, "functional" reading or literary study, understanding or compassion. We are often told (or tell ourselves) we must make choices among aims. I do not agree; the important choice is not to choose among them. I

read or hear about our unwillingness to admit that we do not know how to rise to our aims and about our unwillingness to admit that we have failed to teach many of those who have come to us to learn. I submit that we do not always know how to motivate the reluctant, how to organize instruction so as to bring about mastery, how to identify and nurture talent, or how to stimulate respect and sympathy. Many of us have actually done one or more of these things well, but we do not know how we do them concertedly or systematically.

To say this is not to say that we are ignorant and helpless creatures. In the past decades, we have come to learn a great deal about how people read, what they do when they read with comprehension; about the processes involved in acquiring language, in composing an essay; about the understanding and appreciation of literature, and about the acquisition of critical strategies. This shared knowledge can contribute to our unity. Nonetheless there is more to learn, particularly about how best to plan and organize instruction, how best to intervene and help learners learn, and how to diagnose difficulties and evaluate achievement. We share both successes and challenges with our colleagues around the world, most of whom are facing the same set of problems as we. And this is part of our unity.

Diverse as our students may be, diverse as we may be, we should not allow diversity to breed diversiveness. Within our diversity lies a unity of purpose and it is on that unity that we should build. Our organization is aptly named a Council (what a felicitous term), a bringing together of people to deliberate and consider, to advise each other, to advise other colleagues in English and in related disciplines, and to advise the public -- our employers and our governors. As a Council we should seek to give the best advice in our power -- as we do in our publications and conferences -- not to seek the glib answer,

not to take the defensive posture. As a Council we should strive for honesty and high purpose.

As a Council we should at the same time seek to learn from our publics, as over the past two years we have been seeking to listen to leaders in government and education. We should also learn from our colleagues around the world, those who share our aims and face problems similar to ours. To that end, I am proposing a series of international commissions to take up the issues around the first of the four aims, helping learners become better able to express themselves in writing. At this point over twenty nations from all points on the globe have expressed an eagerness to join. I trust these commissions will help consolidate what is known and undertake a broad agenda in reasearch, evaluation, and curriculum development. These commissions will represent but one small step in our continuing search for unity within diversity.

Another step towards unity, already near completion, is the work of the Commission on the Curriculum, which has set itself the task of defining three broad approaches to the teaching of English. While they have different roots, these approaches -- the heritage approach, the competence approach, and the experimental approach -- have as goals the four aims I cited and complement each other.

A third step, also well underway, is our joining with other disciplines in setting forth a statement entitled, "The Essentials of Education." We are seeking to implement that statement in a continuing dialogue with publishers and our colleagues in science, mathematics, the arts, and social studies -- to name but a few. Let me read from that statement.

"What, then, are the essentials of education?

"Educators agree that the over-arching goal of education is to develop in-

formed, thinking citizens capable of participating in both domestic and world affairs. The development of such citizens depends not only upon education for citizenship but also upon other essentials of education shared by all subjects.

"The interdependence of skills and content is the central concept of the essentials of education. Skills and abilities do not grow in isolation from content. In all subjects, students develop skills in using language and other symbol systems; they develop the ability to reason; they undergo experiences that lead to emotional and social maturity. Students master these skills and abilities through observing, listening, reading, talking, and writing about science, mathematics, history and the social sciences, the arts and other aspects of our intellectual, social, and cultural heritage. As they learn about their world and its heritage they necessarily deepen their skills in language and reasoning and acquire the basis for emotional, aesthetic and social growth. They also become aware of the world around them and develop an understanding and appreciation of the interdependence of the many facets of that world.

"More specifically, the essentials of education include the ability to use language, to think, and to communicate effectively; to use mathematical knowledge and methods to solve problems; to reason logically; to use abstractions and symbols with power and ease; to apply and to understand scientific knowledge and methods; to make use of technology and to understand its limitations; to express oneself through the arts and to understand the artistic expressions of others; to understand other languages and cultures; to understand spatial relationships; to apply knowledge about health, nutrition, and physical activity; to acquire the capacity to meet unexpected challenges; to make informed value judgments; to recognize and to use one's full learning potential; and to prepare to go on learning for a lifetime.

"Such a definition calls for a realization that all disciplines must join together and assert their interdependence. Determining the essentials of education is a continuing process, far more demanding and significant than listing isolated skills assumed to be basic. Putting the essentials of education into practice requires instructional programs based on this new sense of interdependence."

In each of these steps, I trust that we can share our aims with the whole of society. Most people know that language gives power; if all have that power none is a slave to language. We must join with parents, teachers of all subjects, governmental officials, leaders in industry, and others to provide all with access to power. Unified as we may be, we cannot do the job alone, nor should we, for literacy and growth in language are not learned in school alone. As we try to bring unity from our diversity, so we should join hands with all segments of society so that its members might realize our aims and have, thereby, the power of the word.

Alan C. Purves